

Castle Supports Lobbying Reform Package to Close Lobbying and Ethics Gaps, Says It Should Go Further -- May 24, 2007

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Rep.
Castle says reform is long overdue
and
offers amendments to
strengthen package

Washington,
D.C.

-- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle

today supported a long overdue lobby reform package in response to current gaps in the House ethics and lobbying rules and laws exposed in corruption scandals over the past couple years. The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act (H.R. 2316) to expand and strengthen current lobbying disclosure requirements and the penalties associated with violating such rules, as well as the Lobbying Transparency Act (H.R. 2317) which requires lobbyists to disclose "bundled" campaign contributions. An amendment offered by Castle was included in the bill which establishes a sense of the Congress that a lobbyist who is an immediate family member of a Member of Congress cannot use that relationship to gain access or advantage.

"Passage of the lobby reform package today is long overdue. I believe it is our responsibility to close the gaps in our rules and laws that have been exposed and to restore the confidence of the American people in their elected officials. It must be clear that we are here to put the public interest above the special interests. However, while I believe H.R. 2316 takes us in the right direction by building on the changes made to the House Rules earlier this year, it falls short in several areas. I feel there is more that can and should be done and was disappointed that an open debate was not allowed on numerous strengthening

amendments, such as extending the revolving door to two-years for those who leave public service to work in the private sector and establishing an outside investigatory body for ethics violations in the House of Representatives. It is my hope that as we move to a conference agreement with the Senate that we look to further increase transparency and accountability in the system by adopting the reforms I have outlined," said Castle.

H.R.

2316 expands and strengthens current lobbying disclosure requirements and the penalties associated with violating such rules, including for knowingly violating the gift ban, a measure I offered as an amendment in the 109th Congress that was unanimously adopted. The bill further amends House rules to require members and senior staff to disclose to the ethics committee negotiations for employment after they leave Congress, requiring that they recuse themselves when there is a conflict of interest. And, it establishes penalties for influencing the partisan hiring by outside firms. Additionally, it changes House rules to bar contact with a member's spouse who serves as a lobbyist, among other sound provisions.

H.R.

2317 requires lobbyists to provide quarterly reports, accessible to the public, to Congress that disclose "bundled" contributions, multiple campaign contributions that are collected by a lobbyist and forwarded to a candidate or elected official. This is a commonsense transparency measure that will fully disclose the details of who gives what to whom.

Castle offered several strengthening amendments during consideration of the bill, many of which are components of the Accountability and Transparency in Ethics Act (H.R. 97), which he sponsored earlier this year. Only one amendment Rep. Castle offered was allowed to be part of this debate which established a sense of the Congress that a lobbyist who is an immediate family member of a Member of Congress cannot use that relationship to gain access or advantage. This amendment was adopted and incorporated in the base bill.

Amendments

Rep. Castle believes would have strengthened the bill:

- Establish an outside and independent Investigations Commission to review ethics violations.
- Require 8-hour ethics training for lobbyists. Builds on Castle amendment requiring ethics training for members and staff that is now in place. An identical amendment was adopted by the House by voice vote in the 109th Congress.

- Double to two years

the amount of time during which members and senior staff would be prohibited from lobbying their former colleagues. A two-year prohibition was originally in the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, including in the Democratic motion to recommit that many members supported in the 109th Congress. And, it is in the Senate passed bill.

- Prohibit

the conversion of campaign funds to family or personal use by prohibiting the payment of campaign and leadership PAC money to spouses and immediate family members except for nominal reimbursements.

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